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ABSTRACT

Early childhood education is rooted in the Arab culture. Of particular importance for the implementation of early childhood education is the academic psycho-educational movement in the Arab world (initiated by Tsmail El Kabani and Dr. Abel Aziz El Koussy), which began in the 1920s. This movement, combined with rapid social change (including the entrance of women into the work force) led to a push for early education, which centers around ages 2-5 and includes nursery school and kindergarten. For children below age 2, day care centers provide some custodial care. However, early childhood education in Egypt and Kuwait is not included in the regular public education system. Nursery schools mainly provide some kind of "child keeping," while kindergartens are primarily concerned with pre-academic orientation, focusing on preparation for formal school learning. For the future, the emphasis in early childhood education in these countries must not only be upon care, but also upon learning and development. (SKC)

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PERSPECTIVES ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN EGYPT AND KUWAIT

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Abstract

Early childhood education is rooted in the Arab culture. Of particular importance for the implementation of early childhood education is that as early as the twenties this century, the academic psychoeducational movement in the Arab world initiated from the thirties by ElKabani and ElKoussy and the rapid social change, pushed the efforts for this early education which centers on the age of two through five, including nursery school and kindergarten. Below this age, the day care centers provide some kind of custodial child care. However, early childhood education in Egypt and Kuwait is not included as part of the regular public educational system. Nursery schools mainly provide some kind of "child keeping", while kindergartens are primarily concerned with pre-academic orientation, focusing on preparation for formal school learning. For the future, the emphasis in early childhood education must not be only upon care, but rather upon learning and development.

"Perspectives on Early Childhood Education in Egypt and Kuwait"

Early childhood education in Egypt and Kuwait as in Arab countries has a much more recent history than does public education. This form of education (day care centers, nursery schools and kindergartens) in the Arab educational system acts as non-formal education, whereas formal education begins with the first grade primary at six-years-of-age.

The roots of early childhood education in the Arab countries extend to ancient Arab thinkers, as Tbn Sina, El Ghazali, El Safa brothers and others; all of whom were concerned with a child educational approach. Of particular importance for the implementation of early education is that as early as the twenties this century, modern education and psychology were established with the foundation of the Higher Institute of Education in Cairo in 1929 by Tsmail El Kabani, the founder of modern education in Egypt.

But the academic psycho-educational movement in Egypt was initiated from the thirties, and proceeded by virtue of the great Egyptian Psychologist Dr. Abel Aziz El Koussy, who graduated with his Ph.D. with Cyrl Burt in

London University in 1934. El Koussy founded the first psychological clinic called the "Child Guidance Clinic" attached to the Higher Institute of Education (now Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University). The move was followed by a growing concern with the early childhood education.

However, the rapid social change, especially with the women's working phenomenon, and the initiation of some social organizations, especially women's associations, and the impact of Ministry of Social Affairs, pushed the efforts for certain kinds of out-of-home child caring, all of which were responsible for the diversity of the early childhood education today in Egypt and Kuwait.

The early childhood education in Egypt and Kuwait centers on the four-year period in the life of the child from the age of two through age five, and it covers a continuum from nursery school to kindergarten.

It may be said that the age of two is the minimum entrance age into nursery school, and three is the most commonly accepted limit. However, the nursery schools can accept two-year-olds. Below this age, it is the responsibility of day care centers.

The child care centers and homes accept infants

from two month age level. However, they are limited in number and in quality of services offered for infants. These day care centers and homes can be considered as custodial-- places for children of working mothers, where the accent is upon meeting children's basic physical needs. It can be said that the goal of the child day care centers is directed to what can be called "child-keeping", as if they are more shelters for the babies. The chief idea is simply to provide a safe place to leave children while the mothers are working. But these day care centers' services lack the developing requirements and conditions necessary for appropriate caring for children, namely they lack educational-directed services, medical and social services, and intervention programs.

Given today's social change in Egypt, there are few who would argue against the necessity of day care centers. The children of working mothers alone represent an overwhelming group in need of supplemental and appropriate care: roughly a quarter of all Egyptian mothers of preschool and school age children are employed outside of the home. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the work of mothers in Egypt has a economical and personal value. The work for women has to play a role in

raising the family's standard of living, in the woman's sense of identity, security, independence and self-actualization with varying degrees. Considering these changing conditions in the style of life of the Egyptian family, recent legislations give the mother the right to leave her work up to ten years for the sake of caring for her child, emphasizing the conviction that the mother has the responsibility for child rearing and that it is in the best interest of society and the child to keep that responsibility with the mother, and to keep the mother at home.

In Kuwait, with the very high standard of living, the Kuwaiti family depends much upon homemates, caring for different homeservices, including caring for children. This may be the cause of the Kuwaiti's less concern for the day care cneters. This represents a contradictory position for early childhood education in Kuwait: Least concern with day care centers, and great concern with kindergartens.

Day care authorities and personnel, both in Egypt and Kuwait, are separate from educators, showing little initiative in interaction with educational establishments. By the same token, day care centers are under supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs, not of the

Ministry of Education, although education and day care have the common goal of fostering wholesome development among young children, considering that research findings show that characteristics and level of development in the sensori-motor period, according to Piaget, are "predictors" for the developmental discourse of the child in later developmental stages.

For future prespectives, it appears that a close relationship between systems of day care and early childhood education must be established. Equally apparent, it must develop considerable supervision and leadership responsibilities, both governmental and private, parent participations, staff training day care workers, evaluation, legislation, facilities and necessary resources for meaningful educational experiences.

Nursery School

In most cases nursery school education in Egypt and Kuwait exist as private education rather than public nursery schools. Only a small number of communities -- especially in Cairo and Alexandria -- sponsor such facilties. Some provision had been made for the care of those children whose mothers had to work, but almost the only organized nurseries were those sponsored and

supervised by certain institutions and agencies as follows:

(1) Some nursery schools are attached to private regular schools (language schools, foreign schools -- American, British, German, French) and undergo to all the regularities of these schools. This category of nursery schools is of high cost, especially for the foreign schools.

(2) Ministry of Social Affairs sponsors some nursery schools distributed all over the country, especially in big cities which are inexpensive, but lack necessary facilities in resources and personnel.

(3) Some nursery schools are provided by certain private organizations, especially the Women's Societies.

(4) Some Mosques, churches, industrial factories and recreational clubs provide some nursery schools, although limited in number.

(5) Some nursery schools are attached to "Institutes of Primary Teacher's Education." These are provided primarily to serve the training needs of the institutes rather than to care for any large number of children.

Variations in nursery school education are widely characterizing this form of education. The objectives of

nursery schools are to provide some kind of "Child Keeping". By the same token, it might be said that a certain program with its objectives, materials, methods, and evaluation doesn't actually exist. Even a nursery school concept is of gross ambiguity. An emphasis is put to some extent upon the child's socialization and his physical health needs.

Play, both free and organized, represents a basic medium for dealing with children, directed to promote sensory motion and emotional-social development, especially in the highly qualified high cost nursery schools. But in play activities, the aim is enjoyment rather than education.

Kindergartens

In Egypt and Kuwait, kindergartens are generally concerned with four-year-old children. They spend two academic years in activities which precede formal primary education.

Kindergartens, as day care centers and nursery schools, are not included as part of the regular public educational system. With this disassociation, kindergarten programs are not generally housed within public school facilities, and are taught by less certified or less prepared teachers. Kindergartens

continue to exist all over Egypt, especially in big cities, yet they are not considered and supported as public education.

Kuwait had achieved great progress in the kindergarten movement as a contemporary advanced model for kindergartens and for early childhood education in the Arab world. Although kindergartens in Kuwait are still developing, children attend voluntarily and these programs are state supported. The notion that kindergarten is a rightful part of public provided educational experience has won near universal favor in Kuwait. Kindergartens in Kuwait are sponsored, supervised, and supported governmentally through the "Directorate" of Kindergartens" in Ministry of Education.

However, in Egypt diversity of sponsorship and support is the rule governing kindergarten movement. Mainly some kindergartens in Egypt are attached to special regular schools (language schools and foreign schools), others to Institutes of Primary Teachers Education, or to the Ministry of Social Affairs. Certain efforts are initiated by some local organizations such as Women's Societies. Actually the kind of kindergarten education, both in quantity and quality, sponsored and supervised by the above mentioned authorities and

agencies is going to be of big differences according to the environmental, socio-economic and cultural variations. Deriving as it does from these variables, early childhood education in Egypt has evolved in several forms and in different levels. The major type may be considered as "Private for Profit" kindergarten program, making a reasonable profit for the owners. Such programs operate relatively independently and receive their income from fees paid directly by the parents, which usually exceed those that could be paid by low-income families. As such, the majority of the clientele tend to be middle class, relatively affluent, two-worker families.

The families' attitude toward foreign education in Egypt represents a factor which plays a decisive role in children's enrollment in kindergartens, in so much as kindergarten and further stages of education (primary, preparatory and secondary) are closely related to sequential in language and foreign schools.

Another type of kindergarten is what is to be considered as "Private Least profit", provided by community or organizations of citizens, many of which are affiliated with educational institutions, humanitatian service organizations, or social associatitions, which are also under supervision of Ministry of Social Affairs.

A third type is what is to be considered as "Public Least Profit" kindergarten program, which is under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs, of which its services are delivered at very reduced cost to the clientele of low income.

Objectives of the kindergarten are primarily of pre-academic orientation, focusing on preparation for formal school learning. The general activities prescribed by kindergarten curricula place the emphasis upon the pre-academic training. The Pre-"3R" subject of matter (pre-reading, pre-writing, and pre-arithmetic) receive most of the teacher's attention, providing children with a certain degree of school readiness. Objectives are secondarily concerned with the child development sensory-motor development, and emotional-social development. Roughly 60 - 70 percent of a typical kindergarten program is devoted to the pre-academic preparation, while 30 - 40 percent is directed to language based activities (poetry, story listening and telling, telling of daily life experiences, show and tell, etc.) environment, music, singing, and rhythmic activities, arts and crafts. Play represents a main activity in the kindergarten program, taking the form of free play or as a method for instruction.

Concerning teachers in early childhood education, there are big differences in their levels of preparation, competency, and income. Some of them hold a university degree (BA degree), no matter of faculty or specialization. A growing concern for departments of childhood in faculties of education in Egypt and in Kuwait and also institutes of teacher education, provides a limited number of teachers specializing in early childhood education. A high number of teachers in origin is primary school teachers, or finished the secondary school. It is expected that somewhat qualified teachers with relatively high income are working specially in kindergarten programs attached to language and foreign schools.

Research in early childhood education is mainly conducted in faculties of eduction, focusing upon curricula, development behavior modification, play, etc. Certain conferences and symposia were held in Egypt, Kuwait and other Arab countries, and strategies for its fostering.

According to this overview for the status quo of early childhood education in Egypt and Kuwait, a future perspective may help us to have certain directions for development of this form of education. Current early

childhood education in Egypt is provided and sponsored by a diversity of agencies which do not constitute an integrative part of the educational system. This position is responsible for the multiplicity of systems and therefore levels of services offered for children. Early childhood education has achieved some steps of progress, especially kindergarten movement in Kuwait. However, the present status in Egypt has not had the opportunity to achieve such a standard. This position is paradoxical with the research evidence and the attitudes of educators in Egypt and Kuwait and in other Arab countries toward the necessity for provision of some kind of advanced early childhood education.

The emphasis in early childhood education must not be only upon care, but rather upon learning and development. Educationally-oriented programs have to be particularly implemented in the practice of placing children from about the age of three through six years-of-age in a learning environment that leads them gradually and successfully to school readiness. Certain directions for strategy can be considered such as (1) A priority of long range goals in the upgrading and modernization of the professional training programs for teachers and supervisors, in the professional training

programs for teachers an supervisors, in so much as one of the main problems is the lack of trained personnel, (2) A goal is to expand educational programs in faculties of education for teacher preparation for early childhood, and (3) Considering also the development of in-service training for teachers and other personnel involved in the eduction of preschool children.

The strategy must consider the early intevention approach, both for fostering children's potentialities or for early detection of disabled children. So, an emphasis should be to implement a psycho-educational battery of tests for an assessment movement in early childhood education. This movement has to be coincident with the planning for the implementation of a curriculum for preschool children that is flexible, comprehensive, developmentally based and competency oriented.

Much of the responsibility for the development of early childhood education rests with the education leadership, profiting from the contemporary movement of early childhood education, both in theory and practice, considering its relevance to the culture of Arab country, with the enhancement of empirical research and systematic evaluation of our experience.